FINDING A BALANCE:
A Study Of Historic Mansfield Hollow And The Thames River Basin Flood Control Project

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Prepared by the Mansfield Historical Society

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A Note to Teachers

This educational kit, prepared by the Mansfield Historical Society, provides information about the construction and impact of the Mansfield Hollow Dam, built in 1949-52 as part of the Thames River Basin Flood Control Project. A videotape produced by students at the Mansfield Middle School is also included. It highlights the history of the flood control project and the political conflict that it engendered.

The Mansfield Hollow Dam project stirred great controversy in the 1940s. By providing flood protection, the proposed dam promised to be of great benefit to the region as a whole, but it required an enormous sacrifice from the towns of Mansfield, North Windham and Chaplin in terms of loss of property and local control. Compromises had to be made to find a balance between regional needs and local concerns. Minimizing property loss and the preservation of an important historic area were among the issues that needed to be addressed. Today the dam stands as an example of successful resource management. The Thames River Basin area has enjoyed economic growth in areas formerly devastated by flooding (i.e.: from Willimantic to Norwich) and Mansfield has in turn gained an important recreation area with opportunities for hiking, boating, fishing and other outdoor activities.

Teachers may find the information included in this kit useful in the discussion of natural resource management. The controversy over the construction of the dam also provides significant lessons in the political process and the issue of individual rights vs. the common good. The construction of dams, reservoirs, highways and other large public projects require the acquisition of private property. They are built to benefit the general public, but, of necessity, some individuals will suffer personal loss. It is hoped that the information in this kit will prompt a lively discussion of this issue which can be in turn related to other local projects such as the controversy over the redesign of Route 6.

Arrangements may be made through the Mansfield Historical Society (860) 429-6575 to tour the dam site, the historic Kirby Mill and the village of Mansfield Hollow. Members of the Army Corps of Engineers will provide tours of the inside of the dam and will explain its operations. The stone mill, recently purchased by Windham Automated Machines, Inc., is currently undergoing renovations. When the work is finished, students will be able to visit an exhibit about the history of the mill, prepared by the historical society, which will be on permanent display in its lobby. If desired, students can also stroll through the historic village of Mansfield Hollow with its gracious late 18th and early 19th century homes -- a fine example of an early mill village. Brochures outlining a self-guided tour of the village are enclosed. Classes are welcome to picnic at the adjacent Mansfield Hollow State Park.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. **Map Activity** (Using a Connecticut state map and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers map of Thames River Basin Flood Control Project)
   a) What is a river basin?
   b) What are the major rivers in the Thames River Basin?
   c) What rivers in your community are part of the Thames River system?

2. **Discussion** - What is the purpose of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers? Why is its work important?

   The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers traces its roots back to the Revolutionary War when the Massachusetts Provincial Congress appointed Richard Gridley to the rank of Colonel and Chief Engineer of the troops. He oversaw construction of earthwork fortifications to protect American soldiers from British cannon fire in the Battle of Bunker Hill. In 1802, Congress established a separate Corps of Engineers within the Army. In following years, the Corps' role was expanded from solely military construction to include civil work. Today the Corps of Engineers performs work in three broad areas: military construction, reimbursable support to other federal agencies (such as the Environmental Protection Agency's "Superfund" program), and Civil Works which includes navigation, flood control and environmental restoration. The Army Corps of Engineers tackles problems that affect large areas and are too complex and expensive to be handled by states or local communities. Its work is funded by federal tax moneys.

3. **Discussion** - The Thames River Basin Flood Control Project (use enclosed map)
   a) What led to the development of the Thames River Basin Flood Control Project?
   b) Describe the project. What was its purpose?
   c) How does the project impact your community?
   d) The Mansfield Hollow Dam was built for flood control. What are some of the other reasons that dams are built? *(i.e.: power generation, water supply, recreation)*

4. **Teamwork and Role Playing Activity** - Divide class into two teams, one in favor of the construction of the Mansfield Hollow Dam and the other against it.
   a) Using the newspaper articles, letters and information enclosed in the kit, have each team develop a list of arguments to express their viewpoint.
   b) Hold a mock hearing. Have each team present their viewpoints. The students may invent fictional characters to act as witnesses. They can describe how they have personally suffered from floods or how they will be adversely or positively affected by the dam's construction.

5. **Discussion** - Political activism
   a) What techniques did each community use to either promote or fight the construction of the dam? *(i.e.: Seeking support and influence of local and state politicians, letter-writing campaigns, newspaper editorials, special town meetings, etc.)*
   b) What did individuals do to either promote or fight the dam's construction? *(i.e.: form political activist groups [more power in numbers], write letters to newspaper editors*

and politicians, sign petitions, testify at hearings, etc.)

c) How effective were these techniques?

6. Creative Writing Projects

a) Take the role of a person living during the time of the dam's construction. Write about your experience in the flood following the 1938 hurricane and why you are in favor of the Thames River Basin Flood Control Project. Or alternatively, write about the prospect of losing your home to the Mansfield Hollow dam project and your feelings about it.

b) Write a letter to Governor Raymond Baldwin or a letter to the editor of a local paper. Either promote or protest the construction of the Mansfield Hollow Dam.

7. Discussion - The construction of dams, reservoirs, highways and other large public projects require the acquisition of private property. They are built to benefit the general public, but, of necessity, some individuals will suffer personal loss. Compromises need to be made between regional needs and local and personal concerns. Environmental impact also needs to be considered.

a) Which do you think is more important -- the needs of the general public or local and personal concerns? Why?

b) When the Mansfield Hollow Dam was built, how were people compensated for the loss of their personal property?

c) Why was it especially difficult for people to lose their homes during this time period? *(Post-war housing shortage)*

d) What compromises were made in the Thames River Basin Flood Control Project? *(i.e.: Dam was redesigned to reduce property loss; proposed dam in South Coventry was dropped from project [it would have also required land in Mansfield], Army Corps of Engineers gave flowage easements to some property owners that allowed them to retain their property)*

8. Relate themes to other local projects and current events (use materials in appendix)

a) "Highway Anxieties" (Hartford Courant, Nov. 25, 1997) - Controversy has dragged on for years over a proposed expressway through Coventry to replace Route 6, a dangerous stretch of highway known as "Suicide Six" because of its high rate of traffic accidents. The proposed expressway has been rerouted several times because of environmental concerns and has already affected many homeowners.

b) "Alice's Last Stand The Stuff of Legends" (Hartford Courant, Feb. 2, 1998) - This article tells the story of one property owner who refused to leave her home when the Army Corps of Engineers built a flood control dam in Thompson in the early 1960s. The Corps of Engineers eventually purchased her property but allowed her to continue to reside there until her death.

c) Can you think of other local projects that have been built or are proposed that benefit the general public but might adversely affect some communities or individuals? *(examples: widening of Route 195 and Route 6, construction of a football stadium in Storrs)*

9. Related research projects. Research another large public works project. How does it benefit the general public? How did its construction affect the local communities and individuals? What was its impact on the environment?

Some examples:

a) **Quabbin Reservoir in Massachusetts.** It was built to provide drinking water for the city of Boston, but its construction required the removal of the towns of Dana, Greenwich, Prescott, and Enfield. Hundreds of residents were forced to relocate. There is now a large nature preserve at the site.

b) **Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks.** In order to create these parks, thousands of poor Appalachia residents were evicted from their homes. The parks now preserve the environment and wildlife while providing recreational benefits for the general public.

c) **Dike in Grand Forks, Minnesota.** In spring of 1997, Grand Forks suffered devastating floods and a fire that destroyed a large portion of the city. Over 750 buildings were damaged or destroyed in the flood and resulting fire. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is now constructing a massive dike to protect the area from future floods. It will require the destruction of another 150 homes.

RESOURCES

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House of Representatives, 76th Congress, 3rd Session, Document No. 885, Thames River, Conn., Mass., and R. I. -- Letter from the Secretary of War and Report of the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors. Washington, D. C., March 26, 1940.

House of Representative, 78th Congress, 2nd Session, Report No. 1309, Authorizations for Reservoirs, Levees, and Flood Walls for Flood Control. Washington, D. C., March 29, 1944.

Hurricane Views, September 21, 1938. Norwich, CT: The Bulletin-Record Printing Dept., 1938.

Report of the Historic District Study Committee for the Proposed Historic District at Mansfield Hollow, Conn, May 1976. (The research for this report was done by Dr. Meradith T. McMunn, with assistance from David Hall and Dr. Bruce Clouette.)

Statement of the People of the Town of Mansfield, Connecticut on the Matter of the Mansfield Hollow Dam, October 8, 1945.

U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Definite Project Report on Mansfield Hollow Dam and Reservoir, Thames River Basin (Natchaug River) Connecticut. Providence, R. I.: U. S. Engineer Office, May, 1944.

Other Resources:

Land Records -- Towns of Mansfield, Willimantic, and Chaplin

Miscellaneous letters and documents in the collection of the Mansfield Historical Society

Records of U. S. Army Corps of Engineers at Mansfield Hollow Dam and Waltham, MA

Town meeting records - Town of Mansfield, CT

Scrapbook of Mae Bradley -- This contains newspaper articles and letters to the editors that relate to the Mansfield Hollow Dam project. The unidentified articles and letters were printed in The Willimantic Chronicle, The Hartford Times and The Norwich Record.

Photographs:

Mansfield Historical Society
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Bill Stanley, Norwich

Althea Stadler, Mansfield Hollow
Francis Wright, Windham
The Chronicle, Willimantic

Maps:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The video was produced with the assistance of Charter Communications, Willimantic, CT

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I Giovanni Solisti - Live! In Concert, 1993-1994
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West Hartford Public Schools

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- **Historic Mansfield Hollow**
- **The 1938 Hurricane and Flood**
- **The Thames River Basin Flood Control Project**
- **The Conflict over the Mansfield Hollow Dam**
- **The Construction of the Dam**
- **Property Loss**
- **The Establishment of the Mansfield Hollow State Park**

THE VILLAGE OF MANSFIELD HOLLOW

Since the early eighteenth century, Mansfield Hollow has been a community of farms, residences and small industries. The falls over the Natchaug River were recognized early on as a source of water power and by 1728 there was a grist mill on the site. Over the next few decades the grist mill was joined by a fulling mill, a saw mill and an oil mill. A number of these enterprises were owned by the Swift family and the area was for some time known as "Swift's Hollow".

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Mansfield earned fame as a center of silk production. The first silk company in the Hollow was organized in 1833. Other thread companies followed as the mills changed hands many times. In 1882, the silk mill complex was purchased by the National Thread Company, a cotton thread manufacturer. The wooden mill buildings were torn down and the present stone mill was built. For a while the business flourished, but it failed in 1899.

In 1902, George Kirby, à Providence jeweler, bought the mill and started making optical parts and related accessories. After his death in 1965, the mill was conveyed to the State of Connecticut and used by the University as a storage facility for 30 years. It is now owned and being restored by the Windham Automated Machine Co., designers and makers of high-tech machines.

The village today is still composed largely of late 18th and early 19th century dwellings, some of which are fine examples of the rural Greek Revival style. You may see the names of old mill owners and partners on some of the venerable houses -- Swift, Rixford, Bingham and Hinckley. Across from the stone mill are boarding houses that once housed the mill workers. Mansfield Hollow remains an unspoiled example of a 19th century mill village. It was into this tranquil historic setting that the massive structure of the flood control dam was introduced in 1949 -1952.

The Kirby Mill, constructed in 1882 by The National Thread Company

WHY THE DAM WAS BUILT

FLOODING IN THE THAMES RIVER BASIN

The Thames River Basin lies mostly in the eastern third of Connecticut. It includes the Thames River, which enters Long Island Sound at New London, and its tributaries in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island -- an area encompassing 1474 square miles. In Connecticut, it covers all of Windham County and the eastern two-thirds of Tolland and New London Counties. During the nineteenth century, the rivers and streams of the Basin were heavily developed as a source of industrial power and there are many textile plants and other industries in the area.

Although normally peaceful and quiet, the narrow valleys of the Shetucket and Quinebaug Rivers and their tributaries have had a number of serious floods. These narrow valleys contain the most populated areas of the Thames River Basin, where cities and towns grew up around the early water-powered industries.

Before the construction of the Thames River Basin Flood Control Project, manufacturing plants and low-lying residential areas along the Quinebaug River in Massachusetts were periodically flooded at Webster, Dudley, and Southbridge and in Connecticut, at Putnam, Thompson, and Jewett City. Willimantic was subject to flooding from both the Willimantic and Natchaug Rivers. The mill villages of Baltic, Occum, and Taftsville along the lower Shetucket River were occasionally inundated and there had been extensive damage in Norwich when the Shetucket River had run rampant through the city, flooding the business section around Franklin Square.

The lower Shetucket valley had experienced serious flooding before, but it was the flood following the 1938 hurricane that brought the need for flood protection to federal attention. It was the largest flood in the recorded history of the area. For four days before the storm arrived, there had been heavy rain, leaving the ground saturated and the rivers full. On September 21, the hurricane slammed into the coast from South Jersey to Boston with winds of 100 to 130 miles per hour, torrential rain and a tidal wave in its wake. The storm surge following the hurricane pushed water from the coast back up the Thames River, adding to the water rushing down the Quinebaug, Shetucket and Yantic Rivers. In Norwich, the water rose at the rate of 7 feet per hour until it reached an unprecedented height of 8 feet 1 inch in Franklin Square. The dams at Occum, Taftsville, Danielson, Stafford Springs, and Mansfield all went out and the bridges at Occum and Baltic were swept away as well as many smaller bridges. The hurricane and resulting flood brought devastation throughout the region. Flood damages alone totaled nearly $6,000,000.

THEY SAID IT COULDN'T HAPPEN HERE --- BUT IT DID
By Myles E. Standish
The Norwich Bulletin

"Peaceful Eastern Connecticut, for generations smug in its belief that Nature, when on rampage, would never wreak destruction along the valleys of the Thames, the Shetucket and the Quinebaug, today looks askance at every breeze and rising tide. Residents of this corner of the Nutmeg state had, from time immemorial, felt secure from the hurricanes and floods of which they had read in other and far distant parts....

Almost over night this confidence was shattered, when on Wednesday, September 21, 1938, just as summer was turning into autumn, this section of Connecticut was visited by floods that inundated the lowlands to unprecedented depths; a hurricane that left a tangled waste of torn trees, power lines and homes; and last, a tidal wave that swept beaches clean of cottages as though some mighty hand had wielded a gigantic broom, all combining to leave in their wake a record of destruction and death, never before experienced.

Starting with showers on September 14, which were intermittent until Saturday, the 17th, the rain came in torrential proportions for four days to completely saturate the ground to a point where it could hold no more. Rivers to the north of Norwich began as early as Sunday to rise slowly, and by Monday night had reached alarming proportions. Flood warnings were issued early Tuesday, the 20th, and by nightfall rivers were overflowing their banks. During the night reports came in that dams were beginning to go out and that the water was fast approaching the flood stage of 1936. The dam at Stafford was the first to let go, tumbling a great force of water into the Willimantic River that hurtled down on the city of Willimantic, inundating that place to depths never before recorded. Every small stream was contributing plenty of water to the ever-rising flood. The Quinebaug reached flood tide during the night, as did the Shetucket and Yantic, all of which pour their waters into the Thames River at Norwich.

In Norwich anxious eyes kept careful watch on the rising tide which mounted inch by inch during the early morning hours of Wednesday. At mid-morning, the water was slowly creeping up toward the high water mark of 1936 and merchants in the vicinity of Franklin Square began frantically to remove stock from basements to the first floors where water had never reached before. At 2:00 the water was almost lapping at the very edges of Franklin Square and was rapidly rising.

Shortly before 3:00 there was a sudden rise in the water and those along the harbor front began to realize that a stiff wind was pushing the water back up the river. Not even then did they realize that it was being hurled inland by the hurricane that at that particular time was some miles off the coast...

And then, blasting out of the southeast at a speed that at times reached 100 miles an hour came the hurricane. It was not one of the narrow twisters of a few yards width that sweep a path across the plains of the west, but a widespread affair that extended from New York to Nantucket, and the center seemed to sweep right up the Thames River over Norwich and on up the valleys in

Eastern Connecticut until it spent itself far up in New Hampshire. And the most notable feature was that the hurricane lasted almost two hours, then gradually abating until toward midnight the skies were clear and the stars looked down on destruction that was almost beyond comprehension.

Norwich first felt the force of the wind shortly before 3:00 when branches from trees began to fall and put out of commission power lines in various sections of the city. By 3:00 there was a growing feeling of apprehension but even then no one had the slightest inkling that the wind would reach the proportions that it did. Perhaps the only ones who sensed the severity of the storm were the engineers at the Gas & Electric plant, who realized that the electricity in the city should be turned off to prevent any chance of fire from fallen wires. The power went off completely at 3:20, leaving mills, homes and business houses without light.

At this time there was no doubt but what the 20th century Norwich was seeing was something it had never seen before. In every part of the city people trembled in fear as they watched trees, that they had known since childhood, coming crashing to the ground, carrying wires, poles and even roofs along with them. In less than 20 minutes after the hurricane hit Norwich, the city was completely cut off from the outside world, its streets choked with fallen trees, roofs of houses, frail garages, telephone and light poles.

The business section of the city, around Franklin Square, and the streets along the harbor were awash with water from the harbor, augmented by that rushing down from the Shetucket and Yantic Rivers. But the height of the flood was not yet -- that coming with the darkness, between 8 and 9:00. The water rose at a rate estimated at seven feet per hour between 5:30 and 7:00....

When the force of the hurricane had spent itself around 5:00 in the afternoon and people dared venture into the streets of the downtown section, they were sent scurrying back to their places of business by the surprising and alarming rise in the water. Not knowing of the tidal wave that had hit the coast, they were at a loss to account for it, but they worked frantically to rescue merchandise from ground floors where they had thought it to be safe, as all other periods of high water had never touched it.

With water rising at the rate of seven feet per hour, they could do little other than save a few hundred dollars worth of stock. The water came swirling across the docks along the harbor, up Rose Place into Franklin Square, bearing with it floating timbers from wrecked factories and other buildings, motor boats and other debris which crashed into windows and buildings and did additional damage to already badly damaged buildings. Within the short space of three hours after the passing of the hurricane the downtown business section of the city was literally afloat. People marooned in buildings were driven to second stories where they huddled in darkness made more fearsome because of the gurgling of the water beneath them. A few places had candles or lanterns to relieve the frightening blackness. Others of more venturesome spirit waded to higher ground with the water almost up to their necks. Those caught in the area that embraces Franklin Square just had to stay in the building or swim for it.

At the corner of Franklin and Bath streets, by actual measurement, the water was eight feet and one inch deep, while along the Shetucket Street docks, through lower Market and Commerce Streets it was slightly higher. Its height exceeded the past record, set by the flood of 1886 by some six feet. This was especially evident on the railroad trestle over the Shetucket River, where the water was 70 inches over the railroad tracks. During the 1886 flood the water just washed the ties on the bridge. In Rose Place, in front of the Palace Theatre, the high water washed just under the marquee, making a depth at this point, which is lower than Franklin Square, of about 11 feet.

Everyone on Franklin Square, Main Street to Market Street, Market, Commerce, Shetucket and Water Streets, Franklin Street to Willow Street, Chestnut Street, Bath Street, North Main Street, where parts of it were under three feet of water, suffered unestimated damage....

From <u>Hurricane Views, September 21, 1938</u>: Published by *The Bulletin-Record-Printing Department*, Norwich, CT, 1938.

Franklin Square in Norwich, 1938 flood. At Franklin Square, the heart of the business district, water reached a record height of 8 feet 1 inch.

Train Tressel over the Shetucket River in Norwich, 1938 flood. At the height of the flood, the water was 65 inches above the tracks.

Flood at the Pumping Station, Willimantic Reservoir. The dam at the pumping station went out during the '38 hurricane and flood, leaving the city of Willimantic without drinking water and crippled for fire protection.

THE THAMES RIVER BASIN FLOOD CONTROL PROJECT

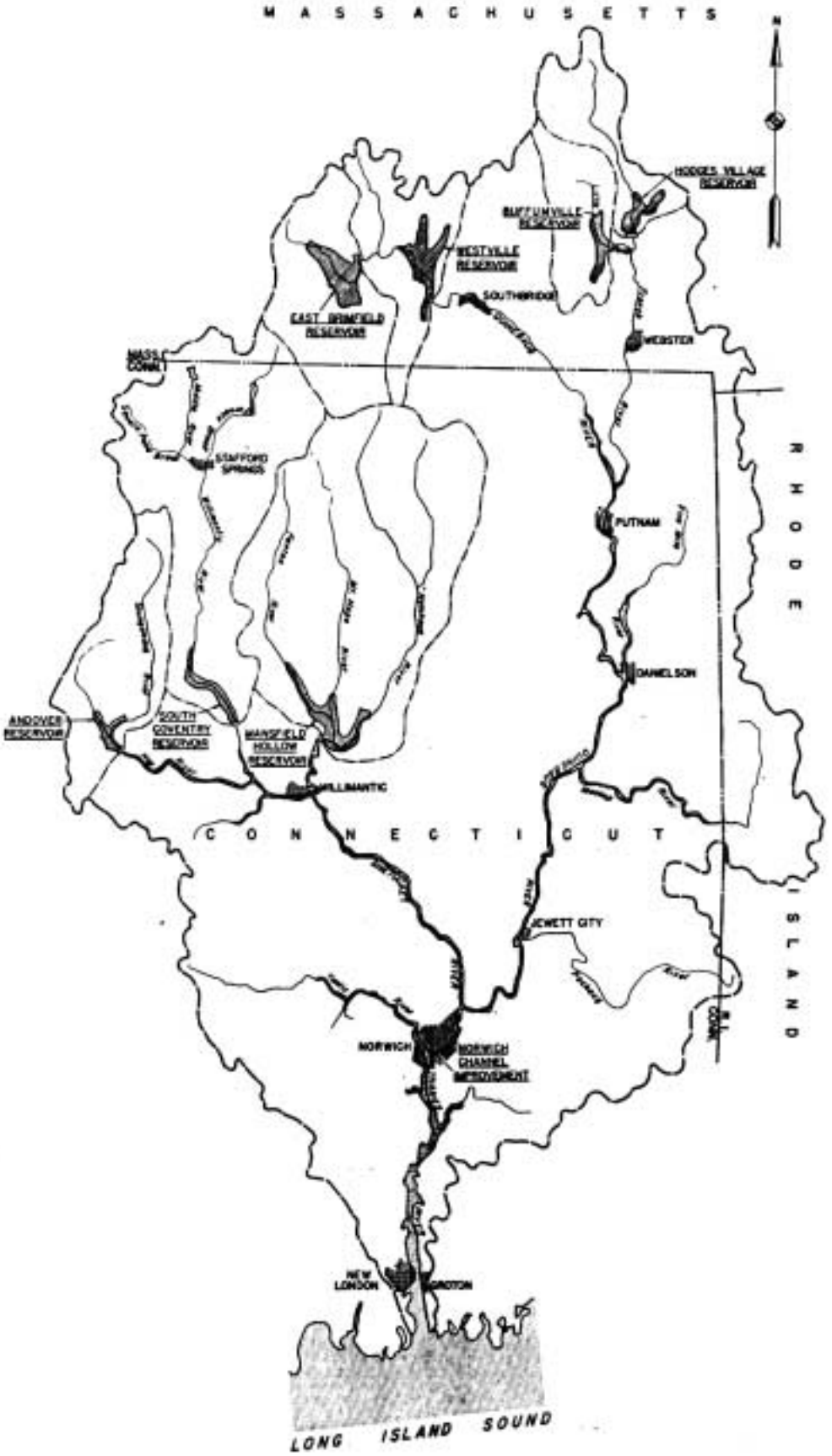
Following a series of terrible floods in the 1920s and 30s, Congress determined, in the Flood Control Act of 1936, that the federal government would participate in the solution of flooding problems too large or complex to be handled by states or local communities. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was given authority for flood control work throughout the nation.

After a serious flood in the Thames River Basin in March 1936 and the disastrous flooding following the Hurricane in September 1938, the Army Corps of Engineers began to study the flooding problems in that area. A "Report on Thames River and Tributaries" proposing a flood protection plan was submitted by the Corps Chief of Engineers to Henry Stimson, Secretary of War, in April of 1940. The plan called for the construction of a system of seven reservoirs -- four located in the upper Quinebaug Basin in Massachusetts and three located in the upper Shetucket Basin in Connecticut. The three units planned for Connecticut were located at Mansfield Hollow on the Natchaug River, at South Coventry on the Willimantic River and at Andover on the Hop River. The effect of the reservoir system would also be supplemented by channel-improvement works at Norwich.

Congress, in the Flood Control Act of Aug. 18, 1941, approved the plan and authorized an expenditure of $6,000,000 for the initiation and partial completion of the project. Another Flood Control Act in December of 1944 authorized its completion. The plan was immediately hailed by the areas around Norwich where the most flood damage was suffered, but it met heavy resistance in communities where the dams were planned. The protest was loudest and strongest in Mansfield where the largest dam was to be constructed. The reservoirs planned for South Coventry and Andover were ultimately dropped from the project, but Mansfielders fought a losing battle.

Laurel Hill Bridge, Norwich. At the height of the '38 flood, water reached a height of 96 inches above the bridge deck. The narrow passage here acts like a bottleneck, causing flood waters to back up into Franklin Square. As part of the Flood Control Project, this section of the channel was widened and deepened.

THE THAMES RIVER BASIN FLOOD CONTROL PROJECT



respect to the improvements at Norwich, that a responsible local agency give assurances satisfactory to the Secretary of War that it will provide without cost to the United States all lands, easements, and rights-of-way necessary for the construction of that project, bear the cost of necessary bridge modifications and reconstruction, hold and save the United States free from claims for damages resulting from the construction of the works, and maintain all the works after completion in accordance with regulations prescribed by the Secretary of War.

J. L. SCHLEY,
Major General,
Chief of Engineers.

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF ENGINEERS FOR RIVERS AND HARBORS

WAR DEPARTMENT,
THE BOARD OF ENGINEERS FOR RIVERS AND HARBORS,
Washington, D. C., March 26, 1940.

Subject: Thames River, Conn., Mass., and R. I.
To: The Chief of Engineers, United States Army.

1. *Authority.*—This report on Thames River and its tributaries, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, is made in response to the following resolutions adopted October 25, and November 4 1938—

Resolved by the Committee on Commerce of the United States Senate, That the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors, created under section 3 of the River and Harbor Act approved June 13, 1902, be, and is hereby, requested to review the report on the Thames River and tributaries, contained in House Document Numbered 644, Seventy-first Congress, third session, for the purpose of determining flood-protection measures for the Thames River and tributaries, including the Quinebaug River at Southbridge, Massachusetts.

Resolved by the Committee on Commerce of the United States Senate, That the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors, created under section 3 of the River and Harbor Act approved June 13, 1902, be, and is hereby, requested to review the report on the Thames River, published as House Document Numbered 644, Seventy-first Congress, third session, with a view to determining what measures or projects should be undertaken at the present time for the control of floods.

and under authority of the Flood Control Act approved June 28, 1938.

2. *Description.*—The Thames River proper is a tidal estuary extending from Long Island Sound at New London, Conn., north to Norwich, Conn., a distance of 15 miles, where it receives the fresh-water discharge of the Shetucket and Yantic Rivers. It drains an area of 1,470 square miles of generally hilly country, with numerous swamps, lakes, and ponds. Shetucket River and Quinebaug River, which joins the Shetucket from the east 3 miles above Norwich, drain the entire upper watershed with a total area of 1,265 square miles. Shetucket River is formed by the junction of the Willimantic and Natchaug Rivers at Willimantic, Conn., and flows southeast 18 miles to its junction with the Yantic River. Its headwaters rise near the Connecticut-Massachusetts line. Exclusive of the Quinebaug Basin it drains an area of 520 square miles in the western portion of the Thames Basin. The Quinebaug River has its sources in southern Massachusetts and flows generally south 62.5 miles to its junction with the Shetucket. It drains the northern and eastern part of the Thames Basin, with an area of 744 square miles. Streams in the

Thames River Basin were extensively developed many years ago as a source of industrial power, and the area contains numerous textile plants and other industries. The population of the watershed is approximately 200,000. The Thames River is navigable to Norwich, the authorized project providing for a channel 25 feet deep and varying in width from 250 feet in the lower river to 200 feet at Norwich.

3. *Flood conditions.*—During the past 110 years there have been four localized floods and six large general floods in the Thames River Basin. Of the latter, however, three have occurred within the last 4 years, one in March 1936, one in July 1938, and the latest in September 1938. The September 1938 flood, with a peak discharge of 75,000 cubic feet per second at Norwich, is the largest flood of record in the basin. Studies of watershed characteristics and hydrological data indicate that floods of over twice this magnitude are a possibility. During large floods extensive inundation of the narrow valleys of the main streams and their tributaries above tidewater takes place. These narrow valleys contain most of the settled areas in the basin, as uplands remain comparatively undeveloped. Numerous industrial plants, railroads, highways, and residential sections are located along or closely adjacent to the streams. In the Quinebaug Basin large manufacturing plants and low-lying residential sections are flooded at Webster, Dudley, and Southbridge, Mass., and at Putnam, Thompson, and Jewett City, Conn. The main square and public center of Stafford Springs, Conn., on the upper Willimantic River, are affected; and farther downstream, sections of the city of Willimantic are flooded. Mill villages on the lower Shetucket, particularly Baltic, Occum, and Taftville, are inundated. At Norwich, the commercial center, gas, and electric plants, and railroad facilities are flooded by the Shetucket River. Much of the widespread flooding and damage throughout the Thames Basin is augmented by local constrictions and extensive encroachments on the natural flood plains. Direct flood damages during the September 1938 flood are reported to have totaled nearly $6,000,000. From a survey of the areas subject to inundation and a study of past flood records, it is estimated that flood losses in the Thames Basin will average $900,000 annually. Substantial intangible losses also occur as the result of dislocation of traffic and facilities and the general disruption of activities of the region. Following the 1938 floods the State of Massachusetts appropriated $1,000,000 for reconstruction purposes. The work performed included channel clearing in the Quinebaug River below Southbridge and some levee work near Sandersdale. Private interests have recently completed certain channel improvements at Southbridge. Flood-control measures now suggested by local interests include reservoirs in the headwaters and local protective works at Norwich and at Willimantic.

4. *Flood-protection plan.*—The plan found most suitable for controlling floods in the Thames Basin provides for the construction of a system of seven reservoirs, four located in the upper Quinebaug Basin in Massachusetts, to control floods in that basin, and three located in the upper Shetucket Basin in Connecticut to control floods from that area. The combined effect of the reservoir system would be supplemented at Norwich by channel-improvement works. The system of reservoirs would provide a high degree of protection to the principal damage centers and, except at Norwich, eliminate any general need for local protective measures. Locations of the seven reservoirs are

shown on the attached map. Features of the reservoir system and estimates of the cost of the project follow:

Reservoir	Drainage area controlled (square miles)	Reservoir capacity (acre-feet)	Estimated cost
Hodges Village	30.0	13,400	$900,000
Buffumville	27.0	11,800	820,000
East Brimfield	50.0	29,800	1,155,000
Westville	37.5	21,100	1,500,000
Mansfield Hollow	189.0	51,200	3,090,000
South Coventry	114.0	36,000	3,335,000
Andover	22.0	10,800	1,030,000
Subtotal	475.5	174,000	12,500,000
Channel work at Norwich			670,000
Total project cost			13,200,000

Annual charges for the project, including $85,000 annually for maintenance and operation, would be $725,000. Benefits that would result from construction of the proposed improvements are estimated to average $750,000 annually. In addition to the evaluated benefits, substantial intangible benefits, including the continued economic welfare and security of the people and the reduction in the hazard to life, would accrue to the project.

5. *Power development.*—The practicability of developing the seven reservoir sites in the combined interests of flood control and power development has been investigated. In each case it is found that the costs of the power features and the necessary additional storage capacity would be substantially in excess of the power benefits. The possibilities of providing storage additional to that needed solely for flood control for the purpose of regulating stream flow for the benefit of downstream power plants also has been studied, and it is found that the additional costs would in each case exceed the power benefits by substantial amounts. The conclusion has, therefore, been reached that the seven proposed reservoirs hold no potentialities for development in the combined interests of flood control and power development.

6. *Conservation.*—Local interests have been consulted to ascertain their interest in providing additional storage at the proposed flood-control reservoirs for regulating stream flow to abate pollution and for other industrial uses. State officials of Massachusetts have indicated a desire to obtain 3,000 acre-feet of conservation storage at the Hodges Village Reservoir and 6,000 acre-feet at both the Buffumville and East Brimfield Reservoirs. No desire has been expressed for conservation storage at any of the other sites. The Board notes that should the flood-control project be authorized, the additional storage capacity for conservation can be provided under authority of the act approved July 19, 1937, which amended section 5 of the 1936 Flood Control Act, to authorize the Secretary of War on recommendation of the Chief of Engineers to modify plans for any authorized flood-control reservoirs to provide additional storage capacity for domestic water supply or other conservation use, on condition that the cost of such increased storage capacity is contributed by States and political subdivisions thereof.

VIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BOARD OF ENGINEERS FOR RIVERS AND HARBORS

7. The comprehensive system of seven reservoirs, controlling 475 square miles of drainage area, or 38 percent of the watershed above Norwich, has been selected to provide a high degree of protection to all of the principal damage centers and reaches of streams below the reservoirs, and the necessary channel improvement at Norwich supplementing the reservoir effect will provide a high degree of protection to that city. The Board finds that tangible benefits that would result from construction of the proposed improvements are substantially equal to the annual charges, and considers that when account is taken of intangible and unevaluated benefits, including the continued economic welfare and development of the area and of the reduction in the hazard to life, the project is justified. It believes that in view of the local character of the improvements at Norwich, local interests should participate in the expense of these works to the extent of providing all necessary lands, easements, and rights-of-way, bearing the cost of necessary bridge modifications and maintaining the improvements after completion. The estimated first cost to local interests for these features is $30,000. The Board recommends construction of a comprehensive system of reservoirs for the control of floods in the Thames River Basin, Conn., Mass., and R. I., and of local channel-improvement works at Norwich, Conn., all substantially as outlined herein, with such modifications as may be found desirable, at an estimated first cost to the United States of $13,200,000, with $85,000 annually for maintenance, subject to the provisions, with respect to the improvements at Norwich, that a responsible local agency give assurances satisfactory to the Secretary of War that it will provide without cost to the United States all lands, easements, and rights-of-way necessary for the construction of that project, bear the cost of necessary bridge modifications and reconstruction, hold and save the United States free from claims for damages resulting from the construction of the works, and maintain all the works after completion in accordance with regulations prescribed by the Secretary of War.

For the Board:

THOMAS M. ROBINS,
Brigadier General, Corps of Engineers,
Senior Member.

THE CONFLICT OVER THE DAM

THE BATTLE LINES ARE SET

When the original plan for the Mansfield Hollow Dam was presented to the public in 1945, it drew immediate heated response from local residents. The original plan brought the dike down to Route 195 in Mansfield Center and required the loss of 65 homes and the relocation of two cemeteries and major portions of Route 6 and Route 89. A citizens action group, led by Dr. Kenneth Kinney, was formed in Mansfield and spearheaded a letter writing campaign directed at state and national legislators. Local engineers presented alternative plans calling for a system of smaller dams on the Fenton, Mt. Hope and Natchaug Rivers. And Rep. E. O. Smith called upon his political allies in Hartford and Washington.

On the other side of the fence, citizens of Norwich waged their own letter writing campaign calling for support of the Flood Control Project and emphasizing their need for flood protection. Rep. Chase Going Woodhouse became their political ally. The battle would rage on for another four years.

Dam Site Home Owners Try to Avoid Big Splash

Heartened somewhat by the backing of several big names in Washington and seething at the arbitrary attitude of certain flood control officials, home owners affected by the Mansfield Dam project are seeking an injunction to hold off attempts to push through the measure immediately.

At the same time many prominent residents within the scope of the dam are privately appealing to residents of Norwich to join in the fight with them.

The project, which would inundate nearly half of the town of Mansfield and leave 67 old line families virtually homeless, is planned on the premise that it would protect the Rose city from flood.

Yet the contention of many is that the building of a large dam to provide for a situation "twice as bad as anything that has happened in 110 years" is wasteful of public funds.

This is the opinion of Leslie Hartson, manufacturer and one of the leaders in the battle to down the project in mid-air.

"We have no objection to the government spending $3,600,000 to benefit Norwich," he told The Sunday Herald, "but we think Norwich would benefit more if it were spent in that city."

HARTSON OPTIMISTIC

Hartson, who stands to lose a textile equipment factory as well as his ancestral home, is optimistic about the chances of heading off the government engineers.

"According to Washington plans," he says, "I suppose we don't amount to much here in the overall flood control picture.

"We don't question that some control is needed but we do think that the engineers are going about things in the wrong way in this section.

"If it is necessary for us to use an injunction to stop the plans in the making we'll do just that.

"We insist on being heard and I personally think we have a good chance of keeping our homes."

Hartson operates a mill that employs about 40 people when going on high and he says he has no idea where he will locate if he has to leave the area.

His home is an attractive affair of better than two centuries old and he is of the opinion that the assessed value of the land has little to do with the actual facts.

In common with many people in the section Hartson does not consider the place he lives in the light of dollars and cents.

With many others he believes in the rock-ribbed theory of permanent homesteading and he figures the price of his property is unestimable.

But of one thing he is pointedly sure.

"We're all as mad as hornets up here," he says, "and it is simply a question whether Washington or ourselves run our own homes."

After a poll of other families within the Mansfield area it becomes apparent that Hartson's views are shared by the majority.

Among the group is a startling galaxy of amateur engineers, every one of whom have an idea that precludes the necessity of building a 68-foot dam anywhere in the section.

The most common theory among those interviewed was that the government could construct a series of smaller water catchers [illegible] accomplish the same purpose.

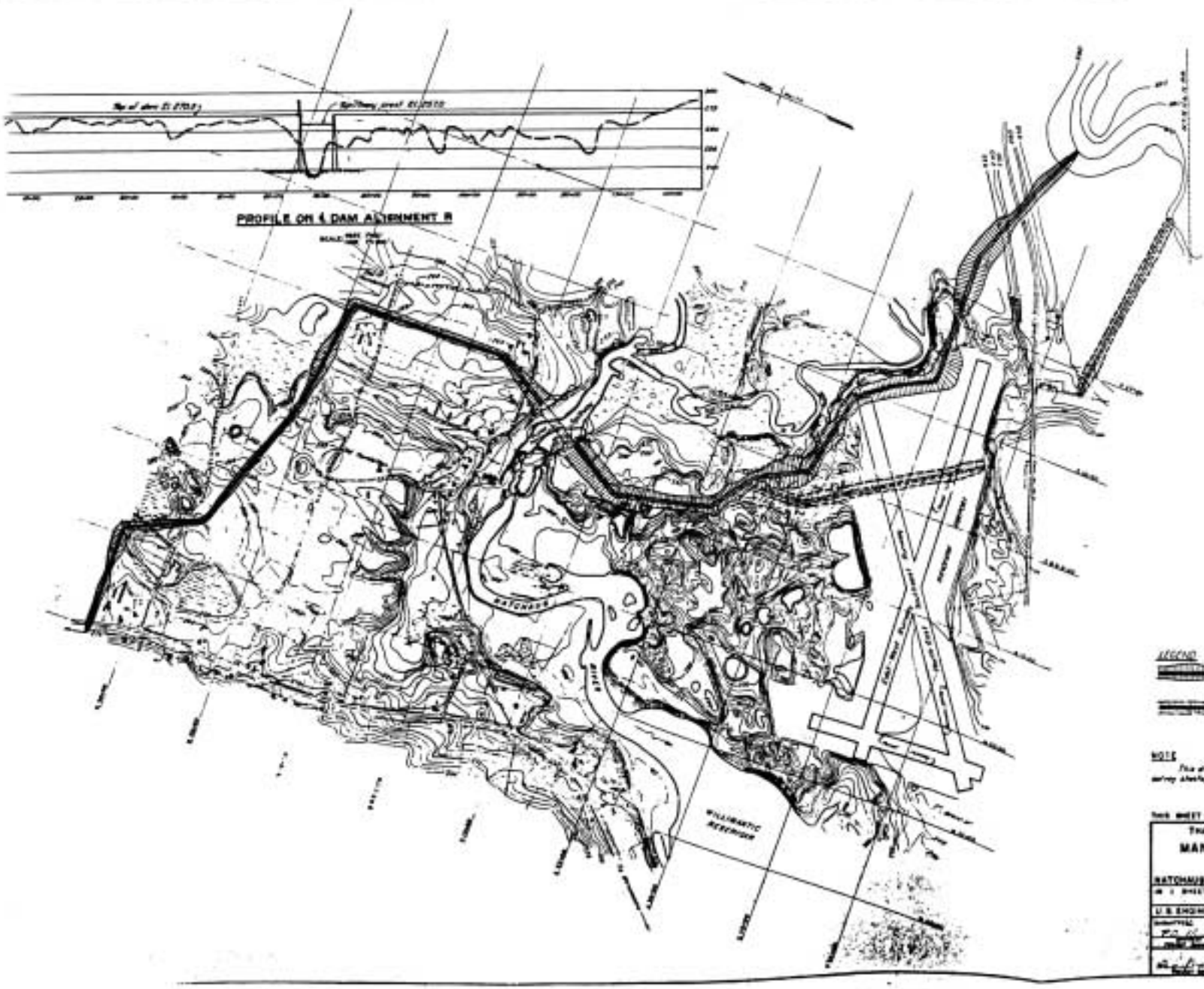
A series of such dams would not greatly affect the living conditions of the natives and very little land would have to be taken over.

APPEAL FOR AID

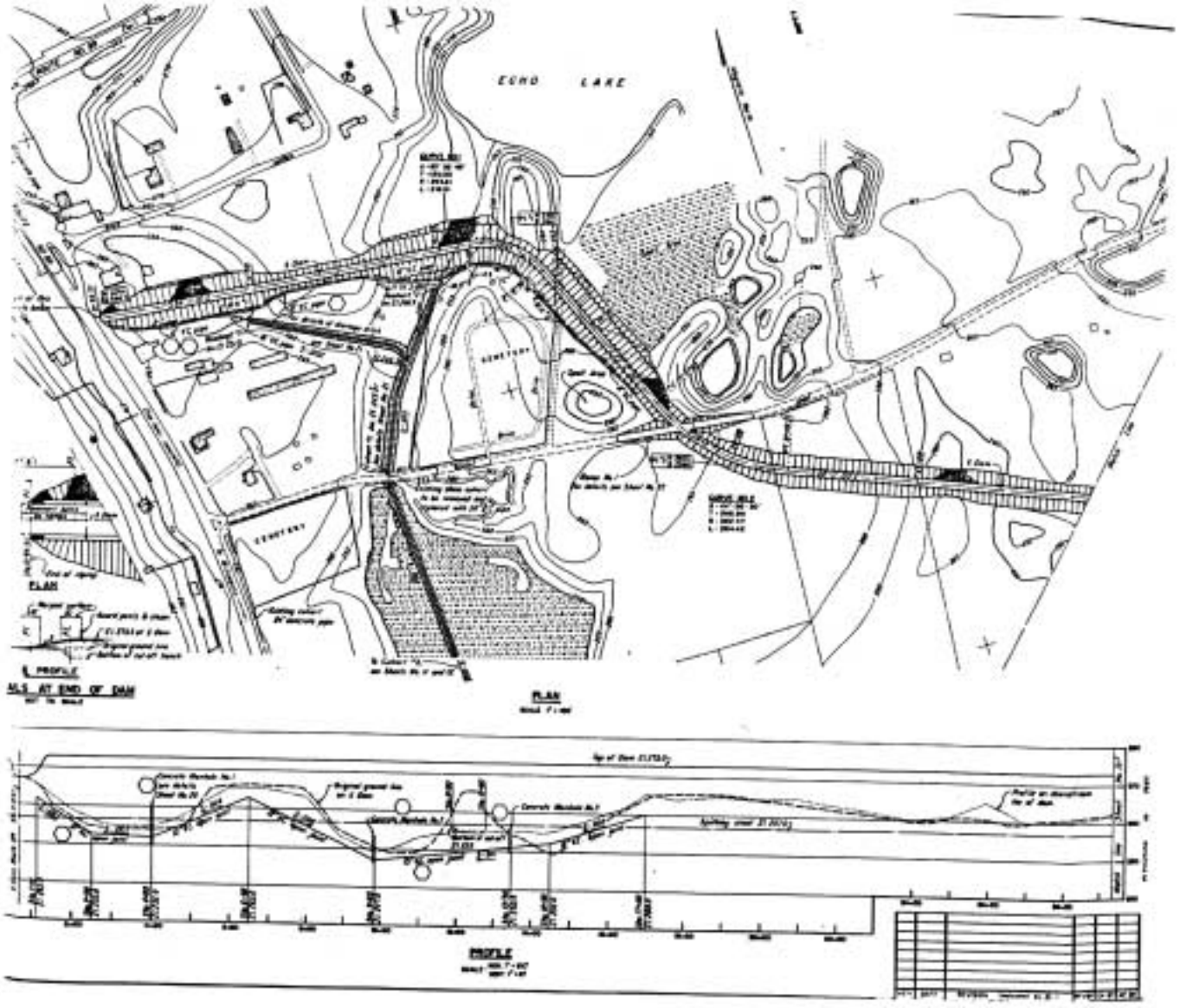
Quite a few of the group are of the opinion that they do not vote right and they think that politics has reared its ugly head to swamp them out.

The section is predominantly Republican but a number of high ranking Dems have shown interest in the plight of the Mansfielders and are greasing the skids for an appeal to Washington.

Late in the week Mrs. Chase Going Woodhouse announced that she would meet with representatives of the Mansfield committee in an effort to straighten out the difficulty.



APPENDIX I PLATE NO.12



The Original Plan for the Mansfield Hollow Dam, 1944. Mansfield residents reacted with horror to the original plan for the dam. The dam dike began at Route 195 in the heart of Mansfield Center. The large building at the corner of Center Road is the Barrows and Burnham store. The new Mansfield Center Cemetery would have been moved, requiring the disinterment of 150 graves, and a major portion of Route 89 would have been relocated. Several historic homes on Route 195, Center Road and Route 89 would have become victims of the dam construction.

THE NORWICH VIEWPOINT

My dear Governor Baldwin:

We note that in the conference of New England governors to take place in Hartford on Tuesday, one of the subjects expected to be discussed is flood control.

This organization quite naturally is emphatically on record favoring the proposed program of the United States army engineers for controlling of floods in the Thames basin. Opposition has risen, however, from those in the basin farther north because of the immediate detrimental effects they would suffer from the project. Other opposition will undoubtedly be heard as the program proceeds. At this writing, however, we refer particularly to the protests of those of the Mansfield Hollow section.

While it is only logical that they might offer opposition to the project, we believe the concern of even greater numbers should be the determining factor in the execution of this flood control program.

We note that a compromise was suggested whereby height of the Mansfield dam would be reduced, thus excluding considerable acreage from inundation at times then the reservoir was filled. It is well to remember in considering such suggestions that capable engineers advocated a dam of a specific type and capacity, such recommendations being made only after exhaustive studies of the minimum requirements to control future floods and protect lives and property in the remainder of the basin below.

The future safety of our people, their homes and their property, are at stake in this issue. Moreover, by reason of the highly industrialized nature of the area and particularly the river valley, valuable manufacturing and commercial properties likewise stand to suffer severe damage in the event of floods - as they have in the past and especially so in 1936 and in 1938. Therefore, we urge your support of the program as recommended by the Army Engineer Corps.

Rex Brown
Executive Vice-President
Norwich Chamber of Commerce

Printed in the Norwich Record, October 25, 1945

THE MANSFIELD VIEWPOINT

On October 8, 1945, members of the State Water Commission and army engineers held a hearing at the Mansfield town hall regarding plans for the proposed Mansfield Hollow Dam. The following statement was presented by the Mansfield Citizens Committee for Flood Control, led by Kenneth K. Kinney, Chairman.

STATEMENT OF THE PEOPLE OF THE TOWN OF MANSFIELD, CONNECTICUT ON THE MATTER OF THE MANSFIELD HOLLOW DAM

The people of the Town of Mansfield, Connecticut, are in favor of necessary flood control. We are sufficiently civic-minded to be willing to assist our fellow communities -- where our aid is of no material advantage to ourselves -- within reasonable limits.

In the matter of the proposed Mansfield Hollow Dam, we believe that:

A. The amount of flood control projected is unwarranted.
B. The burden placed on the Town of Mansfield, as compared with all other contributing communities, is unduly excessive.
C. The plans can be changed to rectify these conditions....

The effects of so large of dam and reservoir on the Town of Mansfield are:

Loss of 2,500 acres
Wiping out of 65 dwellings
Elimination of one factory
Necessity to disinter bodies in two cemeteries
Relocation of four major highways
Dislocation of existing school system
Increase of 13.6% in town taxes

The project as presented calls for seven dams having a total acre-foot capacity of 171,000. Some are as small as 11,800 and 13,000, yet that for the Town of Mansfield is 51,200, virtually one-third of the whole. In addition, the Town of Mansfield will be affected by the South Coventry dam, which will add still further to our burden. The total drainage area controlled is 475.5 square miles. That for the Mansfield Hollow Dam is 159.0 square miles -- one-third of the total.

There is an estimated loss of $300,000 to the total grand list of $2,500,000, thereby reducing the grand list to $2,200,000. There is no federal grant to offset this. The only possible return to the town is a negligible one-quarter of any revenue received by the Federal Government as rent for lease of any of the condemned land. Also there are no irrigation, power, or water storage features in connection with this project which might benefit the town. It is solely flood control.

We in the Town of Mansfield hold that this places an undue burden on our Town. We are willing to bear our share, but why are we required to assume one-third of the total burden of the States of Massachusetts and Connecticut?....

1946 to 1947 - A BATTLE WON, BUT NOT THE WAR

Early in 1946, protesters in Mansfield found some reward for their hard fought campaign. In February, the Corps of Engineers bowed to political pressure and the Mansfield Hollow Dam project was redesigned. The modified plan placed the dam behind Echo Lake, reduced property loss and no longer required the relocation of cemeteries. It was a victory, but the dam project continued to move forward. In July Congress appropriated $1,445,000 to begin its construction and by March of 1947, the first eviction notices were sent to unfortunate homeowners in its path.

Old Homes Doomed by New Dam

First Eviction Notices Received in 'Hollow'

Special to The Hartford Times

Mansfield Hollow — Four families already have been notified that they must abandon their homes by midsummer because of the new Mansfield dam project.

The order was given by Army Engineers who have set up a field office here to begin preparations for the construction of the flood control dam and reservoir, part of the project to protect the Thames River basin.

Construction bids will be received at the Army Engineers' Boston office until next Tuesday. The cost, before construction prices rose, was estimated at $1,500,000.

Mr. and Mrs. Alec Johnson, who purchased the Elmer Lanphear house near the Natchaug River had made many improvements, must leave by the middle of May. Judge of Probate and Mrs. Ralph Anthony must leave soon after, to be followed by Mr. and Mrs. Frank Walker, now wintering in Florida, and her sister and husband, Mr. and Mrs. David Clark, who have lived in the family home for more than 50 years.

Four more families, on Route 89, north of the Buchanan School, have also heard that they must leave to make way for the dikes. For Mrs. Frank Hall this is the ancestral home, and for two neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Hall and Mr. and Mrs. Earl Taylor, the order means leaving houses they built in recent years.

Other families, it is understood will also receive orders to vacate

1947 - A TEMPORARY REPRIEVE

At the end of March 1947, the bids for the Mansfield Hollow Dam project were opened. The lowest bid was almost $1 million above the governmental estimate of $3,300,300 for the project. The matter was referred back to the House Appropriations Committee where, in April, the project was tabled until construction costs could come down. A temporary sigh of relief was breathed in Mansfield and North Windham but protest did not die down. Cries continued for a restudy of the Thames River Basin Flood Control Project and the elimination of the Mansfield Hollow Dam from it.

High Costs Hold Up New Dam Project

Special to The Hartford Times

Mansfield Center—High building costs may delay work on the projected Mansfield Hollow Dam.

This was disclosed today in a letter to Rep. Edwin O. Smith from Rep. H. Seely-Brown who stated, after a reported talk with the Chief of Army Engineers, that "the entire Mansfield Hollow Dam project will be held up, hoping prices will come down sufficiently so that bids may be more nearly in line with authorized expenditures. Nothing will be done for two or three months and possibly even longer."

Bids Too High

Governmental estimates for the project were about $3,300,000 while the lowest bid received was $4,108,792.

Meanwhile, a petition by 70 residents of Mansfield, North Windham and Chaplin has been sent to Washington protesting "the unwarranted expenditure of money at a time when government economy is deemed necessary" and asking for cancellation of the appropriation or a modified method of flood control. Mansfield town officials, it was reported, are contemplating sending a delegation to Washington to protest.

Surveys Being Made

Surveys are being made in the area and red flags have been placed in the countryside showing the location of the proposed dikes, but no purchase of property yet have been made.

Families living nearest the site of the proposed dam have received notices to vacate. Letters from the Boston office of the Army Engineers have been received by Alec Johnson asking him to leave before May 15, and by Ralph Anthony, Frank Walker, David Clark, E. Allen and John Upton asking them to vacate "prior to July 1." Many other property owners, however, have yet received no notice to vacate.

1949 - THE DAM PROJECT IS REVIVED

By May of 1949, construction costs had come down sufficiently for the Mansfield Hollow Dam project to be revived. Bids once again went out and protests reached a new level of urgency. A modification of the dam's design now called for a spillway three feet higher than originally planned and required the acquisition of additional property. At a special town meeting held in Mansfield on May 27, a resolution opposing the dam was adopted and copies were sent to the legislature and offices of the Army Corps of Engineers. At the direction of Rep. E. O. Smith, petitions were also circulated among affected property owners in Mansfield, North Windham and Chaplin. Over 400 residents signed the petition.

Mansfielders Again Fight River Plans

30 Must Sell Homes As Army Revives Work On Flood Control Dam

Natchaug River dwellers, especially those in the Mansfield Hollow district, are again up in arms at the thought of having to vacate their homes in favor of the Natchaug River flood control project which is being reconsidered.

It was two years ago when it became apparent that the control project was to become effective, and at that time there was considerable opposition from localites, more than 30 of whom would be forced to sell their homes.

High building costs, however, caused the abandonment of the project, and the threatened families were given two years' grace.

Army engineers have revived the plan, and the families which will be affected have been warned to start looking for new homes, as the project may be initiated this Summer.

Col. James H. Stratton, division engineer, New England division of the Corps of Engineers, has announced that with the downward turn of construction costs, activity will start. For the present, he said, only properties in the construction area of the dam will be acquired.

The purchase of land in the reservoir area will not be started until next year, he advised the residents.

Bids will be opened in late June.

The Mansfield Hollow dam is one of six to be erected in a comprehensive plan to control floods in the Thames River basin.

New Fight Brews On Mansfield Dam

Special to The Hartford Times

Mansfield Hollow — At least six property owners, one in Mansfield Hollow and five in North Windham, were approached Tuesday by a government agent seeking options on their property in the proposed Mansfield Hollow flood control reservoir basin, but all refused to sign, Town Clerk Ralph Anthony said today.

The agent, Peter W. Connors of Boston, acting for the Army Engineers, said formal requests would be presented to the property owners Thursday or Friday.

• • •

MR. ANTHONY knew the names of only two of those approached, Clarence Anthony of Mansfield Hollow and Stanley Todd of North Windham.

Revival of the plan to construct a reservoir here, dropped two years ago for lack of funds, has aroused strong opposition again.

One item in the call for a special town meeting Friday night is "to determine what action the town shall take in regard to the Mansfield Hollow dam project."

Two years ago a town meeting asked complete abandonment of the project, or modification to greatly reduce the number of homes that would have to be moved, and leave Route 6 in North Windham in its present location.

• • •

AN APPRAISER three weeks ago, however, is reported to have said that the plans now contemplate a spillway three feet higher than that proposed two years ago. Such an increase in height would spread the water at flood time over a much wider area than under the original plans.

Only three floods ever have caused material damage in the Thames River basin in 1635, 1818 and 1938. The Natchaug River on which the proposed reservoir is located, is a tributary of the Thames.

The project received Congressional authorization in 1941, and state approval in 1946, just prior to the original call for bids.

The first step in the program, the dredging of part of the Shetucket River channel at Norwich, was completed this year.

Everyone along the river was pleased with the Mansfield Hollow site except the Mansfield Hollow residents.

Their plight, even in these homeless times, is being overlooked in favor of the betterment of the entire riverfront, and the many hundreds of homes that face the continual threat of flood damage.

RESOLUTION ADOPTED AT SPECIAL TOWN MEETING
MANSFIELD, MAY 27, 1949

The citizens of Mansfield record their renewed and total opposition to the proposed Flood Control Dam at Mansfield Hollow.

From the beginning we have considered the cost of construction and annual maintenance of the projected dams in the Thames Basin to be underestimated and the benefits at downstream points much exaggerated.

No power development has been thought feasible, because it would defeat the purpose of Flood Control. No recreational or scenic advantages are involved in an empty reservoir which would catch excessive rainfall and then let it run out at the earliest possible moment.

To Mansfield the dam would mean nothing but loss. While the present revenue from property taxes would be recoverable under a State law, no further benefit could be had from building in the area affected. Mansfield is growing steadily with the increase in the size of the University of Connecticut and all parts of the Town are needed for further residential development.

The dam reservation would interfere with communication between sections of the Town and would hurt school transportation and fire protection.

A neighborly sympathy with those who would be forced to find new homes adds warmth and even heat to our protest. No payment of present market values can compensate for exile from settled abodes, from church, school, friends or family.

We believe that improvements made and in progress in the vicinity of Norwich materially lessen the need for Flood Control Dams upstream upon which the Thames River Basin project was calculated (by a narrow margin) to be justified.

Mansfield is willing to make reasonable sacrifices to help other communities. It pays its fair share of federal revenue used for public works. It would not enjoy contributing to its own undoing.

We respectfully urge that no further steps be taken to acquire property or seek bids for the Mansfield Hollow Dam. We ask the Town Clerk to forward copies of this statement to the Offices of the Army Engineers at Boston and Providence, to Honorable Chase Going Woodhouse, our Representative in Congress, to Honorable Antoni N. Sadlak, Congressman at Large, to Senator Brien McMahon, and to Senator Raymond E. Baldwin.

JUNE 17, 1949 - A LAST DITCH EFFORT TO STOP THE DAM

Because of continued opposition to the dam construction, a special hearing with representatives of the Army Corps of Engineers was arranged for June 17 at the Buchanan School in Mansfield. The meeting was to allow residents of all the affected districts to present their case. Largely through the efforts of Congresswoman Chase Going Woodhouse and Senator Brian McMahon, work on the dam was halted until after the hearing. About 200 citizens attended the meeting. Opponents called for an alternate plan while representatives from Norwich emphasized their need for the dam's immediate construction. At the conclusion of the meeting, attendees voted unanimously in opposition to the dam in Mansfield Hollow. Unfortunately their protests fell largely on deaf ears.

Open Hearing on Dam Project is Arranged

Congresswoman Woodhouse Gets Consent of Army Engineers to Allow Residents to Present Case.—Work Will be Delayed Until All Opposition Has Been Heard. — All Residents Along Natchaug and Shetucket Rivers Urged to Attend Meeting.

With the increasing wage of opposition to the proposed Mansfield Hollow dam project that would inundate certain sections of North Windham and the town of Mansfield if carried through, a public hearing is to be held by the Army Engineers at the Buchanan school on Route 89 in Mansfield Center on Friday, June 17th at 3 o'clock. It was through the intervention of Congresswoman Chase Going Woodhouse of the second district that consent was given to hold the project in abeyance until such time as the open hearing for residents of the area, extending to Norwich, was heard. At the present time many residents in the North Windham and Mansfield areas, adjacent to the proposed site, have been served with eviction notices.

When contacted at her home in Sprague this morning Mrs. Woodhouse was of the opinion that such projects should not be contemplated when there are other sources of correction at hand, especially when the element of economy is such an important one. On the other hand, she stated, the protection of life and property, sometimes does make such expenditures necessary.

It remains to be seen what the sentiment of the area is when the meeting is held at the Buchanan school, and the Army Engineers will be guided by this trend. Both Mrs. Woodhouse and United States Senator Brien McMahon have been instrumental in holding up inauguration of the work until such time as the people in their districts were given an opportunity to present their case.

Hoping a good representation from the Norwich and Willimantic area will be in attendance, who might ultimately be affected by such a dam, Mrs. Woodhouse seeks good representation from each and every town in the sector when the open meeting is held.

Hot Session Looms On Mansfield Dam

Special to The Hartford Times

Mansfield Center — Army engineers will show maps and plans of the proposed Mansfield Hollow Dam project at a special meeting in Buchanan School Friday at 3 p. m. Rep. Chase Going Woodhouse is expected to attend the hearing.

In a recent letter to the town clerk, Mrs. Woodhouse stated: "If this project is not needed or if it could be reduced in size, steps should be taken so that no money will be spent unnecessarily and no town or individual unnecessarily disturbed. On the other hand, we must be certain that we are safeguarding against the recurrence of the damage caused by the 1936 and 1938 floods."

Some 400 residents of the area have signed a petition opposing the dam. The project is part of a flood control plan in the Thames River basin.

JUNE 28, 1949 - A LOST CAUSE

On June 28, after consideration of the testimony taken at the June 17 meeting in Mansfield, Major-General Lewis A. Pick announced the Corps' decision to proceed with the construction of the Mansfield Hollow Dam. On July 1, the contract was awarded to D. V. Frione and Company, Inc. of New Haven.

WILLIMANTIC, CONN., TUESDAY, JUNE 28, 1949

Construction of Mansfield Hollow Dam Will Proceed

Colonel Stratton Announces Decision by Major-General Pick, Chief of Engineers at Washington. — Action Follows Careful Review of Testimony Taken at Public Hearing. — Awarding of Contract Expected in Very Near Future.

Boston, Mass., June 28—A decision by Major-General Lewis A. Pick, chief of engineers, in Washington, D. C., to proceed with the construction of Mansfield Hollow dam and Reservoir project in Connecticut was announced today by Colonel James H. Stratton, division engineer of the Corps of Engineers in Boston. The reservoir located on the Natchaug River at Mansfield Hollow will provide flood protection to a number of communities downstream, the largest of which is Norwich. The decision to proceed with the construction follows a careful review by the chief of engineers of the testimony taken at the public hearing held by the Army Engineers at Mansfield Center on June 17th, at which proponents and opponents of the project were given opportunity to ask questions and present statements of their views.

Congresswoman Chase Going Woodhouse of the second Conecticut district who had joined United States Senator Brien McMahon in requesting the hearing was present, together with state officials and selectmen of the towns directly affected by the project. Various suggestions were presented by residents of the area for an alternate plan and strong presentations were made by interests located downstream from the proposed reservoir site, emphasizing the need for its construction at the earliest possible date.

Objections to the construction of the project were voiced by a number of witnesses residing in the re-

(Continued on Page Five)

CONSTRUCTION

(Continued From First Page)

servoir area. Colonel Straton stated all the testimony presented both pro and con as well as the alternate proposal suggested were given careful scrutiny both at the Boston Engineer office and by the chief of engineers in Washington. It was determined that no testimony presented at the hearing indicated the need for the project is any less urgent at the present time than when the project was originally authorized by Congress by the flood control act of 1941, and it was decided that construction should proceed in order that protection against further flood damage may be afforded the residents and industries downstream from Mansfield Hollow.

Construction bids were opened on this project on June 22nd, when 14 bids were received. It is expected that contract will be awarded in the very near future, Colonel Stratton stated.

JULY 1949 - CONSTRUCTION BEGINS

In July, construction of the dam began and land acquisition proceeded. On July 6, the Town of Windham voted at a special town meeting to refuse the government's offer for a tract of land near the airport and the property was condemned. Many others who refused to sell their properties outright had condemnation proceeding brought against them. Now individuals had to wage their own battles in the courtroom in an effort to save their properties. In some cases, litigation dragged on for years. The anger felt by many local residents is well expressed by the letter written by Leslie Fuller Hartson.

LETTERS FROM THE PEOPLE

North Windham, Conn.,
July 5, 1949

Editor of The Willimantic Chronicle:—

Tonight the voters of the town of Windham are to vote on an article in the warning relative to selling a tract of land adjacent or a part of the airport to the U. S. government for the purpose of locating the Mansfield Hollow dam. To date I have seen no information as to where it is, how much it is, what we are to get for it, and whether it is to be sold for what the U. S. wishes to pay for it. This dam has been the subject for discussion for several years and the need for it needs no more to be said at this time. I wish every voter could read the letter signed by W. P. Muske of Manchester, which hits the nail squarely on the head in last Saturday's Hartford Courant.

According to what some of the property owners have been offered for their homes the price has been fantastic. This may be the case on what they will want to pay the town.

North Windham is tucked away up in the corner of the town and is separated from Mansfield and Tolland county by a small stream called the Natchaug River in case you don't know.

Of late we have been besieged with a band called Army Engineers who have swarmed over our property like bees with no regard for property rights, digging trenches large enough for ocean going ships, cutting swarths of brush, planting flags in people's yards which only need the Hammer and Sickle to let us know we do not live in a free country, and we are asked to pay some 3 1-4 million in taxes to pay for it.

If by law the government can take this land, well and good, but why we as taxpayers should help the cause along is beyond me.

I say send the Army Engineers back to Boston and send out some common sense engineers. I urge every voter here tonight to vote against selling this land.

LESLIE FULLER HARTSON

CONSTRUCTION OF THE DAM

After four long years of uncertainty, residents around the Mansfield Hollow dam site now faced three years of living with the dirt and noise of construction. This was coupled, for many, with the stress of losing their homes and property. It was not a happy time for many.

Construction of the Mansfield Hollow Dam began in July of 1949 and it was completed in 1952 at a cost of $6.5 million. Hundreds of acres and tons of soil were disturbed during the construction process and following its completion, the area surrounding the dam site was described as "a barren wasteland." The lake that exists today was not added until a decade later.

The Natchaug River and Mill Dam in Mansfield Hollow
Prior to the building of the Flood Control Dam

THE COMPLETED DAM

The Mansfield Hollow Dam is composed of earthfill with stone slope protection. It has a length of 14,050 feet and a height of 68 feet. A concrete spillway spans the main channel of the Natchaug River with a concrete weir 690 feet long and a maximum elevation of 273 feet. 70,500 cubic yards of concrete were used to complete the structure -- all prepared on site. The project also consists of six earthfill dikes with stone slopes that total 2,656 feet in length and have a maximum height of 53 feet.

During periods of high water, the five gated conduits at the base of the spillway are closed and water collects in the flood storage area. The water is then released slowly to prevent flooding downstream. The total area of the reservoir is 2,472 acres and at maximum capacity, it can hold 16.1 billion gallons of water. The project provides substantial flood protection for the communities of Willimantic, South Windham, Baltic, Occum, Taftsville and Norwich.

The almost completed earthen dam and concrete spillway, facing north. To the left is the village of Mansfield Hollow and the Kirby Mill. The homes behind the dike on the right are among those that were removed or destroyed.

PROPERTY LOSS

THE DAM PROJECT BRINGS PERSONAL LOSS

In order to construct the Mansfield Hollow flood control project, the U.S. Government took over 2,300 acres of land in Mansfield, North Windham and Chaplin. Some 200 families lost property and over 30 homes were destroyed, dismantled or moved to new locations. Farmers like the Allens, the Johnsons and the Seplowitz family lost not only their homes but their livelihood.

Property owners were paid what the government considered fair market value -- $1,000 an acre for residential land, $1,200 an acre for commercial land, $100 an acre for agricultural land, $60 an acre for pasture land, and $40 an acre for woodland. Yet it was little compensation for being uprooted and for the disruption of families' lives. People lost more than property -- emotional ties to homes and land were severed and neighborhoods were broken up.

Many sold their properties outright, but others chose to fight the government action. The government brought condemnation proceedings against these individuals. Some cases were tied up in litigation until the mid 1960s, but there were few victories. Only a few families whose homes were at the level of the spillway were granted flowage easements. This allowed them to keep their properties, but gave the Army Corps of Engineers access.

Even today, over forty years later, feelings of loss and resentment run deep for many. Sometimes sacrifices have to be made for the good of the majority, but when the sacrifice is personal, it is hard to accept; it is hard to forgive.

The Home of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert G. Chappell (Tract #35). This lovely home, built c. 1889, stood on the hill above Mansfield Hollow, behind the present day dike. It was the largest house to be demolished. The Chappell family subsequently moved to Chaplin.

MANSFIELD HOLLOW ROAD

The homes on Mansfield Hollow Road directly behind the dike were the first homes to be taken. Three of the homes were owned by members of the Anthony family. The road was rerouted and the abandoned portion of Mansfield Hollow Road is now submerged in the lake.

The Home of David and Sarah Clark (Tract #14B). This was the girlhood home of Sarah (Johnson) Clark. The family moved to Conantville and the house was torn down.

The Home of Clarence and Marjorie Anthony (Tract #15). The house was moved from the corner of Upton Road and Mansfield Hollow Road to the top of the hill. It now serves as the Headquarters of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

BASSETTS BRIDGE ROAD

The homes on Bassetts Bridge Road behind the dike were taken and later sold to the highest bidder for dismantling. The entrance to the State Park now stands on their land.

The Home of Wesley and Mae Bradley (Tract #34). The Bradleys moved to a small house behind the Town Library. Their former home was dismantled.

The Home of the George Clark Family (Tract #34). This was the girlhood home of Mae (Clark) Bradley.

"Flood control dam and dikes took us out of home ... and the old home place (George Clark's) was put into a park along with our homeland. We spent 37 happy years here. The government put it into a park and the river was put into a lake (some change). Hardly think it was necessary for flood control. It's 20 years later as I pen this in 1968 and no signs of needing it."

Written by Mae Bradley, January 1968

CHAFFEEVILLE

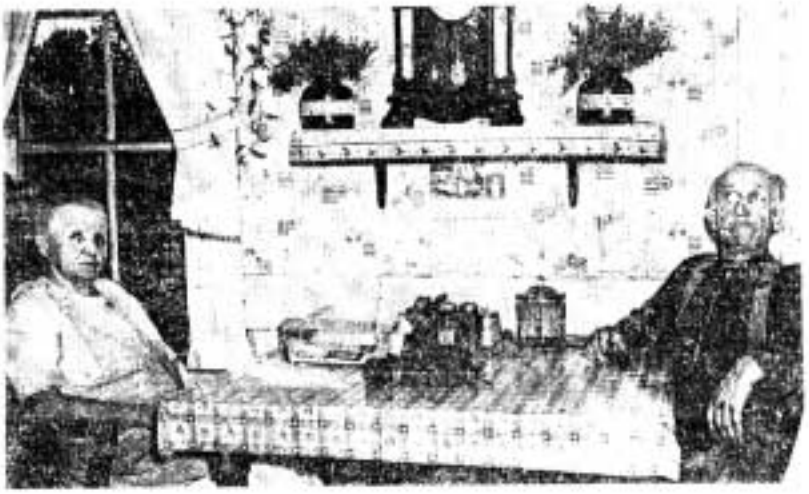
In Chaffeeville, a large portion of Chaffeeville Road which was below the 260' elevation line was discontinued. The houses located here were moved and the road was rerouted to a higher elevation. The old road and bridge abutments are still visible.

The home of Anon Anonson (Tract #190), formerly known as the Doc Chaffee house, was moved to Franklin.

The Chaffee Barn and Creamery. This barn, located on the Rebi property, once housed the prize cattle of J. Dwight Chaffee. It was demolished when the dam was built.

ROUTE 89, CHAFFEEVILLE ROAD & BAKER ROAD

Sections of Route 89 and Chaffeeville Road that were below the 260' elevation line were discontinued and the homes in these areas were destroyed or dismantled. These sections of road were rerouted to higher elevation. Baker Road which ran between Chaffeeville Road and Wormwood Hill Road was also abandoned and the houses there were torn down. There are still cellar holes visible along these discontinued sections of road.



Etna and Franklin Hall in the kitchen of their home. This home was located on the discontinued section of Route 89. It was the ancestral home of Mrs. Hall, built by her parents some 80 years before the photograph was taken. She grew up in this house and was married here. The Hall's ties to their home were strong as they were for most families who lost their homes to the dam construction.

The Home of Franklin and Etna Hall (Tract #166), as it appeared in November 1953 when the Government offered it for removal to the highest bidder. The final bid was $15.00. The house was dismantled and the lumber was used to renovate the Mansfield City General Store for use as a rental property.

NORTH WINDHAM
ROUTE 6 & NORTH WINDHAM ROAD

A large section of Route 6 in North Windham was rerouted and several homes in this area were moved. There are cellar holes still visible along the abandoned portion of old Route 6. Some of the homes along North Windham Road were also moved to new locations. The 118 acre farm belonging to the Alex Seplowitz family was taken and their home and farm buildings were demolished. The doorstep to the Seplowitz home is still visible by the recreation area parking lot in North Windham.

The home of Francis E. and Ellen Bonin (Tract # 37). To the rear are the Fred L. Thomas house (Tract # 54) and the home of Myron and Fannie Lyon (Tract # 53). The Bonin and Lyon houses were moved to the corner of Carefree Lane off new Route 6.

The home of Orin L. & Viola Moseley on old Route 6 (Tract #7). This house, like a number of others in this area, was moved south to Gamache Lane off the relocated section of Route 6. Other houses were relocated to Tiny Lane and Crystal Lane.

AFTERMATH

THE DAM'S FIRST TEST

The newly completed Mansfield Hollow Dam received its first real test with the arrival of Hurricane Diane on August 19, 1955 and the flood in its aftermath. The gates of the new dam were closed and the dam filled to almost 67% of its capacity. The water was then safely released over the course of the next several weeks. The Army Corps of Engineers estimated that it reduced flood damage along the Natchaug and Shetucket Rivers by some $3,190,000 from Willimantic to New London.

In contrast there was considerable damage along the untamed Willimantic River. The proposed dam in South Coventry on the Willimantic River as well as the dam planned for its tributary, the Hop River, had earlier been dropped from the Thames River Basin Flood Control Project. Without the dams, the Willimantic River was uncontrollable. In Stafford, the dam at Sweetheart Lake gave way pouring the lake waters into the already swollen river. The torrent rampaged through the lower section of Stafford Springs and then continued towards Mansfield and Coventry. A large section of Route 44A was washed out, leaving a hole eight feet deep and 200 yards wide just east of Brigham Tavern. The torrent rushed on, collapsing the dam at Eagleville and inundating large sections of Willimantic. The rampage of the Willimantic River left only one road out of twelve passable between Stafford Springs and Willimantic and put the railroad out of the commission.

In contrast, sections of Willimantic normally flooded by the Natchaug River received no damage thanks to the Mansfield Hollow Dam. Controversy over the dam quieted considerably after the 1955 flood.

The Mansfield Hollow Dam and Reservoir following the 1955 flood. The photograph was taken on Aug. 28, nine days after the arrival of Hurricane Diane. Some water had already been released from the reservoir by this time. At the height of the flood, the dam filled to 67% of its full capacity.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE PARK AND THE BUILDING OF THE RECREATION LAKE

The Mansfield Hollow Dam was designed originally as a flood control facility with no use planned for power or recreation. Aside from a small pool, it was intended to be empty except during periods of high water.

Soon after the building of the dam became inevitable, local residents began to explore ways to use the dam site for recreational purposes. A state park was established at the site shortly after the dam was completed in 1952. The park included a picnic area, baseball field and facilities.

In 1949, a group of Mansfield citizens led by Seymour Bigelow, developed a plan for four lakes in the reservoir area, including a large seasonal lake behind the spillway. Their proposal was ultimately rejected but public interest in the concept never waned. Many felt that a recreation lake would give the local communities some benefit from the dam and help compensate for property loss. The public's wishes were finally met in 1962 when the Army Corps of Engineers constructed a 500 acre lake on the site.

Today the Mansfield Hollow State Park and dam is enjoyed by thousands each year. On warm days the parklands are filled with boaters, fisherman, hikers, and picnickers. Enthusiasts of radio-control airplanes and boats also frequent the park. Canoeists glide past old bridge abutments and submerged roads and hikers wander past stone walls and old foundations. Few are aware of these poignant reminders of homes and neighborhoods long gone.

After years of controversy, a successful balance has been found between regional needs and local concerns. Local residents have gained an important recreation area while Norwich and other communities downstream have enjoyed economic growth in areas formerly threatened by flooding. The Mansfield Hollow Dam, once the site of so much anguish, is now considered an asset by both the local communities and State.

A new route for an expressway that would replace Route 6 is unnerving homeowners along its path.

By LISA GOLDBERG
Courant Staff Writer

INSIDE

A map of the proposed Alternative 133A in Coventry and Andover.
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HIGHWAY ANXIETIES

Bob and Tracy Blanchard had heard about the proposal to build an expressway through Coventry, so they did some research before deciding to buy the corner lot at Majus Drive and South Street 2 1/2 years ago.

They could find no planned route for the expressway that came close to the spot where they would soon build their house, their first as a married couple. When they moved in, they were very happy.

"It's everything I ever worked for and everything my wife dreamed of having," Bob Blanchard said. "We expected to spend our lives out here."

Two months ago, the Blanchards became part of the 32-year-old saga of the eastern Connecticut expressway, the highway that would replace Route 6 as a thoroughfare connecting Bolton Notch and Willimantic.

The young couple are among 23 homeowners — 20 in Coventry, three in Andover — who stand to lose their houses if the latest expressway proposal is approved.

The new proposal, known as Alternative 133A, would connect I-384 in Bolton and the Route 6 bypass around Willimantic. State officials say the expressway would get through-traffic off Route 6 and improve safety on a stretch of the old highway known for its high rate of fatal accidents.

The state Department of Transportation has not publicly identified or notified the property owners who could be affected, saying it's still too early in the planning process.

But nervous anticipation is building. Workers in the Coventry planning department say they get calls and visits daily from residents asking whether they will lose their homes — a question town workers cannot answer.

For the Blanchards, though, the answer is clear. The hot pink line on state maps that marks off the route of Alternative 133A passes squarely through the intersection of Majus Drive and South Street. But state officials warn that Alternative 133A is not definite, and even if it gains approval from state and federal regulatory agencies, the route could still shift.

They also say they don't plan to repeat the mistakes of the past, when the transportation department bought 30 houses in the late 1980s for a highway route that was later rejected as too environmentally damaging. The rejection caused the state to

Please see **ANXIETY, Page A12**

ANXIETY OVER HIGHWAY PLAN

Continued from Page 1

change its procedures for buying highway rights of way, said Edgar Hurle, the DOT's director of environmental planning. The department requires conditional approval from the Army Corps of Engineers, the federal permitting agency, before notifying homeowners that their houses will be taken for a highway.

Bob Blanchard, who has landscaped, built a deck and flower boxes and restored an old barn on his property, said he has no plans to put life on hold while he waits for Alternative 133A to be approved or rejected.

"We had — still do have — big plans for this place," he said.

Deja Vu

Those who lost their land to the failed plan a decade ago say they understand what the Blanchards must be feeling.

William and Evelyn Dickson lost a house, a swimming pool, the corner of their driveway and about 20 acres on Brewster Street to the Route 6 project in the 1960s. Although they were able to keep the house Evelyn Dickson's father built for them more than 50 years ago, the state took the house her parents had lived in next door.

These days, the couple watch their nephew, Mike Dickson, who lives about 3 miles away, go through the same ordeal they did as he tries to find out whether Alternative 133A could take his house, or at least put the highway in his backyard.

JOHN LONG / THE HARTFORD COURANT

EVELYN AND WILLIAM DICKSON of Coventry lost the house Evelyn Dickson's parents lived in nearby and land the couple owned to the Route 6 project in the 1980s. A new proposal for an eastern Connecticut expressway, called Alternative 133A, would put the highway within yards of the Dicksons' house and that of their nephew, who lives 3 miles away.

"They've held him hostage for 30 years for the stupid highway," said Mike Dickson, referring to his 81-year-old uncle. "Now we're in the same position."

Under Alternative 133A, both Dickson families could be so close to the highway they would smell the exhaust fumes.

Mike Dickson and his wife, Terry, live on Silver Street about 650 feet north of its intersection with South Street. State maps show that the state could take land on Silver Street as close as 50 feet north of their house. The slightest shift in the planned route could take their house of 24 years, one section of which is an 18th century schoolhouse.

The Dicksons never figured the expressway would be so close after watching the road plan cross several hundred yards south in each of the previous plans.

While he waits to see what the state will do, Mike Dickson, a toolmaker, wonders whether he should put any money into his house. He said he'd like to build a deck and barn.

Although both Mike and Terry Dickson oppose the expressway, they're also tired of the years of discussion, the uncertainty and the endless meetings on the same issue: how best to improve safety on Route 6.

"The worst thing about this going on for 30 years is that all the people who live around us are in similar circumstances," Mike Dickson said. "We just don't know what will happen."

Double Jeopardy

Peter and Elna DeCarli have had two houses threatened by the expressway. Now Alternative 133A appears to have taken their property out of harm's way. But he's not counting on it just yet.

"I tell you, I know what I've gone through for 35 years and I don't wish it on nobody," Peter DeCarli said. "You don't stab a person in the back for 35 years. My whole life has been this highway."

The DeCarlis, now in their late 50s, moved into a house on South Street in 1964. Scarcely a year later, the first expressway surveyor showed up on their doorstep and told them a highway would be going through their house.

Twenty years later, the DeCarlis were finally forced to sell that house and nearly 18 of their 47 acres to the state for the failed 1980s highway.

The couple built another house on South Street, about a quarter-mile away. A few years ago, that house became threatened by a new expressway plan.

Alternative 133A does not affect their house, and the land they lost in the late 1980s also does not lie in its path. Still, Peter DeCarli doesn't take anything for granted.

"We're still threatened to a certain extent," he said. "There's no set route for a highway yet — if they build a highway."

The question of whether the expressway will be built is also on the minds of the state officials preparing a permit application for Alternative 133A.

The latest route proposal, like others before it, has created controversy. The federal Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have objected to Alternative 133A, saying it looks too much like a route rejected in 1986 as environmentally damaging. The EPA, which has veto power over the project, has threatened to exercise that power on 133A. The new route is a "strong candidate" for a veto, the EPA said in a recent letter to the Army Corps of Engineers.

Of Grapes And Dentistry

Many of the people who feel newly threatened by a Route 6 expressway live along one of two sections that have shifted north of previous suggested routes.

One cuts through Silver Street to the intersection of South Street and Majus Drive, through Bishop Lane and Skinner Hill Road into Andover.

The route is nearly the same as previous designs around Wheeling and Bear Swamp roads in Andover, but shifts north again and heads into Coventry, cutting through Bunker Hill Road east of its intersection with Parker Bridge Road.

The Blanchards and the younger Dicksons live along the first shift in the route. Tony Maulucci grows grapes along the second.

The road plan bisects Maulucci's Nutmeg Vineyard off Bunker Hill Road in the southern part of Coventry, but Maulucci doesn't mind that the state might be coming through — as long as all 38 of his acres are purchased.

If the state wants his land, they can't just take a sliver through the middle, he said. After all, winemaking is his livelihood, and what good is a vineyard split in two?

Still, Maulucci, who has grown grapes on his land for 26 years and operated a winery for 15, sees the newest route as a godsend.

"Originally, I planned it to be a family business, and the kids would take over. But that hasn't happened, and it probably won't happen," said Maulucci, 59. "I thought about it, and this was a blessing. It's a way out. I don't have to worry about finding a buyer."

Maulucci's views are unusual, though. A more common refrain among Coventry residents along the path of the expressway comes from Jack Bynes, who is upset by what the proposal could do to his dental practice.

Bynes' house and office would be about 600 feet from the expressway, which would cut behind his property on the south side of South Street by the Skungamaug River.

Bynes has designed his practice to be soothing for dental phobics and uses the lush woods and soothing sounds of a waterfall behind his dental building as a way of calming patients. They look out on the scenery through huge windows that open to the sounds of nature. Bynes sees his land, which has attracted bobcats, mink and otter, as a spiritual retreat and a legacy to his children and grandchildren.

In winter, the roadway would be easier to see through the bare trees. The DOT would also build the road at a higher elevation near Bynes property because a bridge would have to span the river.

"It's truly tranquil, and to have a highway a few hundred feet away would ruin it," he said.

"If I can't open up the windows ever again — I get too upset when I discuss this."

While many of the people affected say they don't want a road coming through, they say if one is built, they'd rather the state take their houses than leave a road in their back yards.

Some say they feel trapped. Even if they wanted to sell their houses, they figure they couldn't get a decent price for land that could be taken for a highway or for land that would back up to an expressway.

"What would kill me is if they built the highway in my backyard and then watching half my money go away," said Mike Gnazzo, who lives next to the Blanchards on Majus Drive. His house is about 100 feet away from the land the DOT plans to buy for the expressway. "That would make me sick."

And with the submission of a formal application for the road project to the Army Corps of Engineers expected by the end of fall, people like the Blanchards are busy.

Bob Blanchard said he has written to state legislators, the state Department of Environmental Protection, the governor's office and the Corps telling them he doesn't think an expressway is the answer to the problems on Route 6.

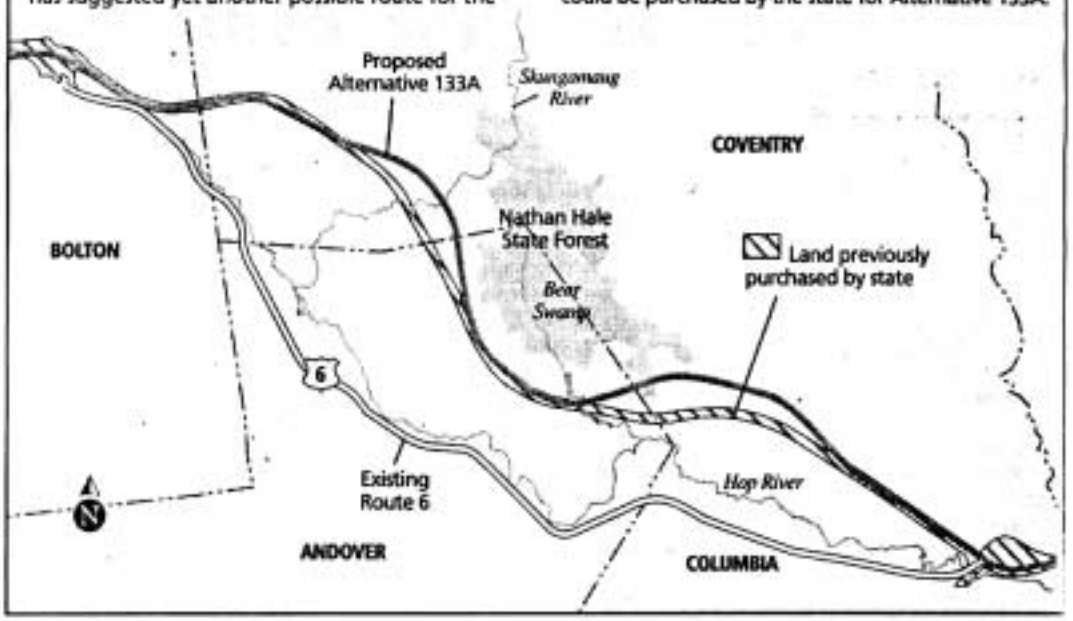
He has joined the fight waged by the others who came before him.

Evelyn Dickson, 78, still gets upset when she talks about the expressway. For years, she has clipped newspaper accounts about the proposals and written letters opposing the project.

In a letter to the Coventry Town Council that was part of a January 1995 public forum on the expressway, the Dicksons wrote: "Coventry has nothing to gain, only the loss of the very thing that makes it unique: The country life which gives us the quality of life we desire."

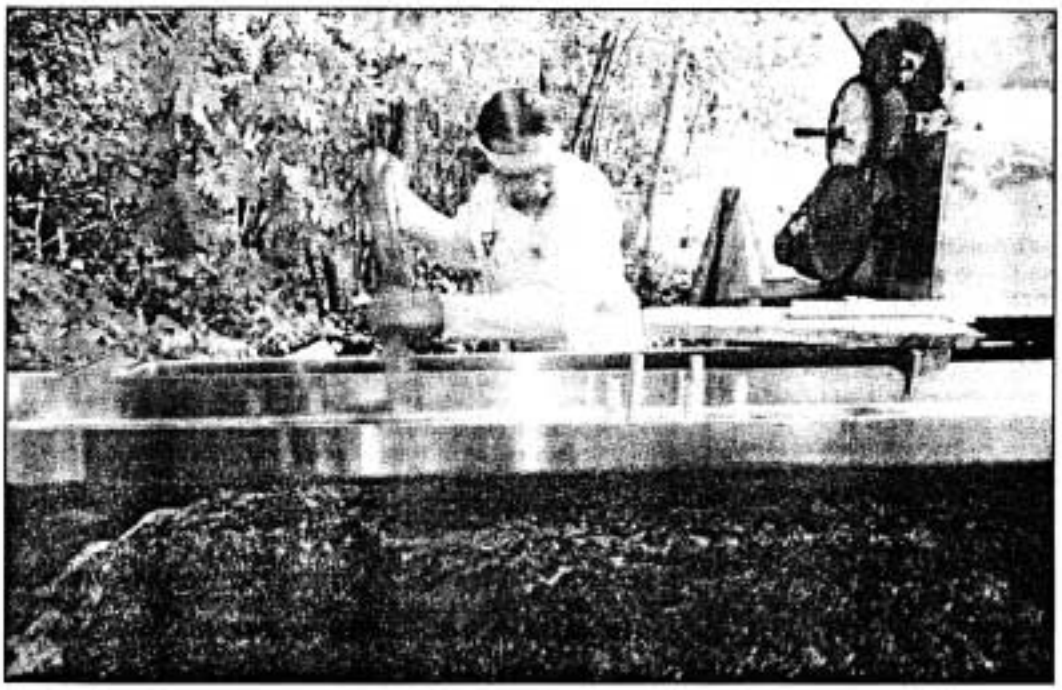
Making way for an expressway

■ The struggle to build an eastern Connecticut expressway between Bolton Notch and Willimantic has spanned 32 years. The state Department of Transportation, in an effort to resolve the dispute, has suggested yet another possible route for the highway, known as Alternative 133A. The route deviates from another that was laid out in the 1980s, for which the state purchased 30 houses and other property. Now, 23 different houses and other property could be purchased by the state for Alternative 133A.



SOURCE: Connecticut Department of Transportation

The Hartford Courant



PATRICK RAYCRAFT / SPECIAL TO THE COURANT

TONY MAULUCCI, stirring a tank of fermenting crushed grapes at his winery in Coventry, doesn't mind that Alternative 133A may cut through his Nutmeg Vineyard property — as long as the state purchases all 38 acres.

Monday, February 2, 1998 ◆ THE HARTFORD COURANT ◆ A3

Alice's Last Stand The Stuff Of Legend

'Lady Who Beat The Government' Becomes Folklore

By DIANE SCARPONI
Associated Press

THOMPSON — Armed with a shotgun and not shy about using it, Alice Azubah Ramsdell refused to let the federal government take her home and farm for a flood control project.

Folks differ on what exactly she said to the Army Corps of Engineers some three decades ago, but they agree the message was clear: You'll take this farm over my dead body.

Though the government eventually seized Ramsdell's property, they allowed her to live out her life on the farm her ancestors built more than 250 years ago in this northeastern corner of Connecticut.

Ramsdell died three years ago at age 87, and the Corps of Engineers is now making final plans to demolish the ramshackle farmhouse. Only local folklore is left to preserve the memory of Alice Ramsdell's last stand — and last laugh.

Preservationists grudgingly agree nothing can be done to save the white clapboard farm, part of which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Still, they cringe at the thought that the home to eight generations of a New England family will soon be set aflame in a training exercise for firefighters.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

THE ABANDONED HOME OF ALICE Ramsdell in Thompson is soon to be set aflame in a training exercise for firefighters.

"I consider it a tragedy that a once wonderful, productive farm with so many architectural styles represented on it has wound up becoming a bonfire," said Jane Vercelli, local historical society president and a family friend. "It's a needless loss of our local history."

Who Was Alice Ramsdell?

Ramsdell traced her mother's side of the family to 1636, when Nathaniel Ballard was born in Massachusetts, beginning a huge and storied family that still holds annual reunions that Ramsdell once presided over.

On her father's side of the family was Hezekiah Ramsdell, a Methodist minister who worked a circuit of Methodists that ran as far as Pennsylvania.

Parts of the Ramsdell farmhouse date back to 1736, with the front section displaying a curious regional architectural style known as a "brick-end," since two sides of the house are made of brick.

The barn, built in 1840, is unique among New England barns, said Frank White, a curator of farm machinery at Old Sturbridge Village and an authority on the region's barns. It has a pent-roof on the barnyard side to further protect the barn and animals from the weather, a style borrowed from the Germans who settled Pennsylvania.

Alice Ramsdell, born in 1907, was the oldest of two sisters on the sprawling farm. Their father, Frank Ramsdell, was a surveyor and railroad buff, recalled a friend and co-worker on town history projects, Ruth DeAmicis.

"Alice sort of took up the role of son and went with her dad to do a lot of outdoor work, while the sister did inside housework," DeAmicis said.

She learned surveying from her father, learned to run farm machinery, put up the hay, butcher chickens and shear sheep. She operated sometimes on a barter system, trading some wool or eggs for what she needed.

The family tended fruit trees, developing a kind of apple known in the region as the Ramsdell apple.

She also shared her father's passion for railroads, and for years she gave area schoolchildren and railroad buffs presentations on the 18-ton small-gauge locomotive the family kept in a shed on the farm.

She never married, but she joined countless couples as a justice of the peace. She is survived by a sister and nephew.

The Last Stand

Alice Ramsdell might have lived a quiet, somewhat eccentric Yankee life if it weren't for the Flood of 1955, when the French and Quinebaug rivers overflowed, sweeping away neighborhoods and breaking buildings "like cracker boxes," the Thomspon Bicentennial Book recounts.

In the aftermath of the flood, the Corps of Engineers planned to erect a dam and create a lake to control the waters. In the way was the West Thompson neighborhood and the Ramsdell farm.

Please see ALICE, Page A4

Alice Ramsdell's Last Stand Folklore

Continued from Page A3

In the early 1960s, the government began approaching landowners to sell and relocate. Fifty homes were taken. But not Ramsdell's.

"When they came to her, she refused to sell. She said even if there's a flood, the water will never come up to the house," DeAmicis said, recalling her conversations with Ramsdell.

After repeating her position in a few meetings with the Corps of Engineers, Ramsdell finally had enough and let the business end of a loaded shotgun do the talking.

The corps relented, agreeing to permit Ramsdell to stay on the land for a $75 monthly rent until she died, with the understanding the farmyard could still be flooded, said project manager Kate Higgins. The corps also agreed to let her move the farmhouse to another plot of land the family owned, but the move was never made.

"Alice would not leave, and the understanding I have is, she is the only person in New England who was asked to leave who didn't leave," Higgins said.

Many townsfolk here consider Alice a heroine. She was honored as marshal of the town's bicentennial celebration in 1985, and people still revere her as the "lady who beat the government."

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ALICE RAMSDELL REFUSED to leave her farmhouse when the federal government wanted to take her land for a flood control project in the 1960s. The Army Corps of Engineers eventually seized her land but allowed her to live out her life there. Here, in 1964, she sits in the parlor of the house.

The Final Days

As Ramsdell aged, the house and several outbuildings, including the barn, chicken coop, locomotive shed and carriage house, fell into disrepair.

When she was in her 80s, she was trying to fix the roof when she fell off and was badly injured. The fall impaired her walking and eventually sent her to a nursing home, where she died Dec. 27, 1994.

Today, a ragged blue tarp hangs over part of the house's roof. The first-floor windows are boarded up, and the second-story windows are mostly broken or missing, revealing rooms with stained and torn wallpaper in pink and blue floral patterns.

The front porch where Alice Ramsdell confronted government agents is litter-strewn with corncobs and an old raccoon trap, and the decorative whitewashed tracery around the porch peels in the winter damp and cold.

Plastic Easter lilies sprout from beneath a sickly tree. Hulks of farm machinery, wagons and buggies rust nearby.

The farmyard, once home to bleating sheep and clucking chickens, stands silent, except for the distant calls of Canada geese that rest on the lake that was the farm's undoing.

But locals say Alice Ramsdell had the last laugh.

She had no engineering skills, but from her surveying work she knew enough to argue her farm was not in danger of flooding from the dam project.

"She was absolutely right. Even at the highest water, it never came up that far," DeAmicis said.